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LANGUAGE TEACHING WITH CARTOONS.

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SHORT WELL-MADE CARTOONS, CAREFULLY MATCHED TO ORAL AND WRITTEN TEXTS, COMMAND THE LANGUAGE STUDENT'S ATTENTION BECAUSE OF THEIR NOVELTY AND MULTISENSORY APPEAL. THEY ARE ALSO IDEAL VEHICLES FOR THE DYNAMIC PRESENTATION OF EVERYDAY SITUATIONS WHICH CAN SERVE AS SETTINGS FOR NORMAL SPEECH PATTERNS. THESE FOUR-MINUTE CARTOONS LEND THEMSELVES TO A VARIETY OF APPROACHES SUCH AS VIEWING THE FILM WITH OR WITHOUT THE SOUND AND DISCUSSING THE FILM WITH OR WITHOUT PRESENTING THE DIALOG. IF THE TECHNIQUES USED ARE EDUCATIONALLY SOUND, THE STUDENT SHOULD ACQUIRE THE BASIC LANGUAGE SKILLS AND GAIN AN APPRECIATION OF THE CULTURE AND CIVILIZATION OF THE COUNTRY WHOSE LANGUAGE HE IS STUDYING. THIS ARTICLE APPEARED IN "FILM USER," JUNE 1964. (SS)

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Language teaching with cartoons

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LEARNING A LANGUAGE may be both a conscious and an intuitive act, but recent advances in modern language teaching method have given the intuitive factor increasing importance, to the advantage of the teaching situation.

Since there is no direct link and direct transition from theoretical study of linguistic structures to oral mastery of the language, we are forced to consider whether we go from conscious study of language structures to intuitive speech, through practice in speech habits and skills, or whether the possession of near-automatic oral speech facility, on whatever level, must come before grammatical analysis.

As a teacher I am primarily concerned with optimum results on a communicative level. To obtain these I require willing learners and dynamic and carefully prepared teaching tools; and I must know exactly where I am going, and why I am adopting this or that teaching technique. As regards the learner's attitude to his subject I wish to know what causes motivation in language learning, why it is limited in certain learners, and to what extent I can create positive motivation in the classroom.

I am equally concerned with the learner's perceptive processes. Since the degree of awareness both in the individual and the group may vary, I must consider how I can maintain the learners' awareness at minimum variability. Since motivation is, in part, linked with hereditary phenomena, and since I know that awareness is *not* fully under the voluntary control of the learner, the problem of creating maximum stimulus within the stimulus-response relationships in the classroom becomes one of paramount importance for the language teacher. As for the practical researcher, it is clearly his duty, keeping in mind these and other facts, to attempt to create instructional materials which lead to that concentration and canalisation of awareness ... that intelligent interest which is bound to help the learning situation and diminish the teaching difficulties. In other words, the practical researcher *must* help both the teacher *and* the learner.

Dynamic Teaching Tools

There is always a tendency in the classroom for the pupil to hear only half of what his teacher is saying. We must therefore find ways and means to alleviate this situation, by judiciously using dynamic teaching tools which will in no way rob us of our valuable time. It is the language teacher's duty to aid the memory of his charges through meaningful teaching, and that means also through the careful use and exploitation of meaningful teaching situations, both textual and others. "I see and I understand", an old Chinese proverb informs us.

Our modern audio-visual language courses and the most recently created visual language-teaching media are both the result of the belief that the picture represents an element of reality more basic and potent than any language, and that the doubly powerful impact made on the learning processes by live or recorded speech patterns, allied to their *exact* visual counterparts, cannot but speed greatly the consolidation of acquired speech in the foreign tongue. This I am also convinced of, and it is my duty, after years of work in this field, to put before colleagues — as well as before those concerned with the power of the moving image — certain obvious results which have also received confirmation from other quarters.

More Effective and Enjoyable

Our range of modern language teaching tools has recently received a very important addition. The 8mm film-loop mounted in plastic cassettes for showing in the British Technicolor 800E film projector and its American counterparts has now been added to our system of ML teaching auxiliaries and I believe it will make an impact on language teaching method, as well as on content of the lesson, within the next few years. These two new mechanical devices will, I am confident, contribute towards more meaningful learning, as well as towards more effective and enjoyable teaching. And I hope we may agree that academic rigour and enjoyment of a lesson are not at all incompatible; if in the past pedagogues *did* hold this opinion, it contributed materially towards tarnishing the image of the teacher.

What are the implications of these two developments — the animated teaching loop film, in colour, of four minutes length maximum, and the new projectors? If it is agreed that the visual memory is able to make a vital contribution to the process of language learning by tying pictorial sequences to text, both oral and written, thus bringing into play within the classroom the auditive, visual, oral and, finally, factual memories, and if it is agreed that the simplicity and elegance of shape and form of the short *animated* teaching film, coupled with the psychological impact of carefully chosen colour on the mind, act as powerful stimuli to the total retentive powers of pupils, then the content of the film pictures must form a major consideration.

Furthermore, the creator of such short animated teaching films must keep in mind that we do not perceive the familiar. It is not as if we shrink from it — we just take it for granted. Intimate faces, streets we walk day by day, the house we live in: all these things are part of us like our skin, and because we know them by heart we do *not*

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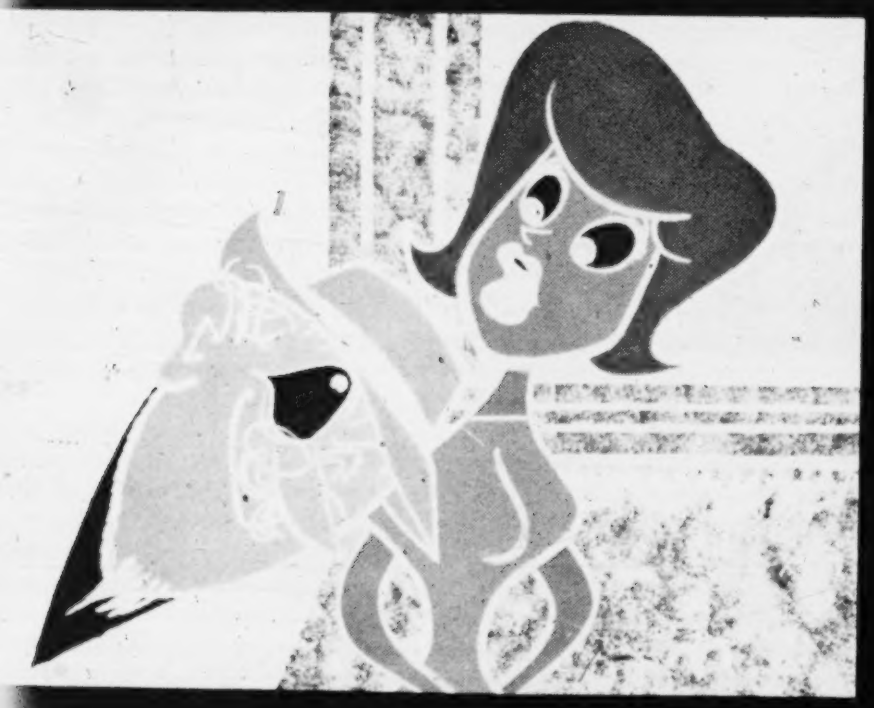
know them with the eye. Hence the cartoon art form has been chosen for this particular project. It commands attention, and, if wielded with restraint, respect and approval.

The problem facing us is how to get our charges to think or "near-think" in the foreign tongue. The view that only a person's native language is linked with thought has now been refuted by research. A good command of language is always characterised by the ability of the speaker to think in it. Once the handling of the foreign language structures has become automatic, the user of that language very rarely, if ever, requires the sheet anchor of thought in his native tongue. Once a certain degree of fluency and attendant confidence have been attained, the pupil seems to forget the existence of his mother tongue whilst he is listening to, speaking, reading and, finally, writing in a foreign tongue. Here the short teaching film showing action, but always confining itself to essentials, is invaluable.

The fact that this language teaching auxiliary should confine itself to essentials must *not*, however, mean that it should be devoid of artistic beauty. I am in disagreement with Kamenev who holds that the visual ML teaching aid should be as neutral and unattractive as possible, keeping in mind that its primary purpose is to help the teacher more effectively. If the majority of our pupils are totally indifferent to printed instructional materials in the language class, there is no doubt that indifferent presentation of pictorial material contributes markedly to a state of mind.

Situations as a Stimulus

We are aiming at what Piaget calls "the productive form of instruction" — the endeavour to create situations which, while not absolutely spontaneous in themselves, *evoke* spontaneous elaboration on the part of the learner. The attempt must therefore be made to create, within the stimulus-and-response relationship in the classroom, material so dynamic and at the same time so simple as an organic whole — preferably an incident, clear in its verbal development and shunning all that smacks of the contrived and the "jeu intellectuel" — that speech patterns may be presented logically within it.



What are the various techniques which we might adopt in harnessing this teaching tool to the effective and creative flow of our course?

(1) Keeping in mind that the art form chosen will command attention we may wish to expose our pupils to four minutes of silent viewing. A well-trained group will already contain a good number of pupils who, even during this first silent presentation, will think — create their own embryo commentary in the foreign language. In the process of "language aiguillonnage" a start has been made. If now the film is shown a second time with a simultaneous commentary, at whatever degree of difficulty, we are harnessing the visual to the auditive stimulus and thus are likely to achieve near-intuitive learning — particularly if in the follow-up we orientate our questions towards verbal progression, cause and effect as well as descriptive detail. There is, of course, room for repetition, for a running commentary by individual pupils—for single-word answers at a lower level, and for drill in grammatical categories — immanently embedded in the incidents shown.

(2) If we decide to show the film with a simultaneous commentary at a *first* viewing we must be careful not to make this commentary too difficult. A second step in this approach might then be an oral commentary with questions on the verbal development of what has been seen. In the first stage we have given primacy to the visual memory and have kept our commentary to a minimum, concentrating on essentials. The visual memory has aided the auditive memory in conceptual thought. The purely oral presentation with its attendant cut and thrust will have a powerful consolidating impact. A third silent showing might recall additional detail.

(3) There are those, again, who will wish to present the story orally prior to exposing the class to the celluloid version. They may say that our main concern in the classroom is not the training of the visual faculties but certainly of the auditive, oral and factual memories. This group of colleagues may say that their charges must be able to listen with great attention to grasp the association of actions and ideas, and to be able to speak, read and write in the foreign tongue. In integrating these new auxiliaries into their course they will say that what has been heard is subsequently seen, and a process of mental acknowledgment takes place in which primacy has been given to the auditive memory, aided powerfully through the consolidating visual impact. If thereafter the students

Below in outline is the plot of the first cartoon film in the series about the Carré family, called "L' incident dans le métro." Within its four minutes of running time it contains humour and plenty of incident. Twelve such films, says Mr. Fleming, can be the vehicle for almost every important language pattern, a large number of key-verbs, and a very solid portion of basic active vocabulary.

Monsieur Carré is working in his office. He is tired, and glad that it is nearly time to go home. Having left the office in good order, our hero walks to a kiosk to buy an evening paper, then gets on a métro train. He takes the only free seat, next to an attractive young lady, and starts reading his paper. But the heat of the compartment seems to affect him, and slowly his head droops until it comes to rest on the young lady's shoulder — to her embarrassment and the consternation of other passengers. Only a small boy is amused, until his mother gives him a nasty look. Suddenly Monsieur Carré wakes up and looks at us. Next his glance moves towards the owner of the shoulder on which he has been resting so comfortably. She is angry and leaves the compartment in a huff. Now it is Monsieur Carré who sits there embarrassed, still not knowing quite what has happened.

LEFT.—*"La tête de Monsieur Carré reste sur l'épaule de la jeune femme". The twelve films are the work of Halas & Batchelor and will be distributed by Macmillans, the publishers*

The 800E, a class learning French, and a pre-release trial of one of the new colour cartoons on the Carré family

are exposed to the moving image, the visual element, far from creating a mental barrier, acts as a spreading and reinforcing factor in the process of intelligent assimilation of linguistic content.

Whatever our approach in wielding this teaching tool, which never distorts or destroys the creative give and take between teacher and class, but acts merely as a modest but highly effective intermediary, and does *not* rob the master of his valuable time, we will wish to obtain evidence of increasingly accurate oral fluency as well as markedly increased facility in written narration and composition through the highly flexible use of these materials — employed in moderation always and within the system of ML teaching aids.

A series of twelve short language-teaching films, and French teaching films in particular, can undoubtedly, if carefully devised, be the vehicle for almost every important language pattern and a large number of key-verbs, not to mention a very solid portion of basic active vocabulary, which pupils are expected to handle by the time they begin their fifth year of foreign language instruction. In other words, this particular teaching aid helps pupils to acquire more easily those basic language skills which, in themselves, represent the goal of many, but which, for a slowly increasing minority, may be the springboard for further study.

Some of these films could well make a contribution towards greater appreciation of the customs, culture and even of the history of the country whose language is being learned.

The first six films of this project of twelve have already been seen by a large number of language teachers, both in this country and abroad, and the projector is now in use in a very considerable number of schools and colleges (both in England and on the continent). The international Audio-Visual Aids Colloquy held at Antwerp in April, 1963, and subsequently published reports in continental specialist journals, again confirmed the rapidly spreading interest in this new teaching tool. It is expected that the entire project of twelve such animated cartoon films, all in colour and of 4-5 minutes' length, will show incidents in the lives of the Carré family: *L'incident dans le métro* is the first.

While one may agree with Belyayev that the acquisition of a foreign tongue may have both a conscious and an intuitive character, it must also be conceded that, within the classroom, the desire to learn and the wish to be taught are not at all the same thing. It may, therefore, be sound method to reduce the degree of conscious learning wherever possible without, at the same time, diminishing the intensity of pupil application — and the *short* teaching film may well help to do just that.

A situation must, therefore, be arrived at where the pupil realises that the close viewing of the moving pictures represents just one more important, but not necessarily the most important, link in the chain of thought and learning processes, enabling him to attain mastery of the foreign tongue. Hence $4\frac{1}{2}$ minutes is the maximum time given to a single showing in visual form.

Far be it from me to pronounce ex cathedra on "the correct way of putting over new linguistic content on the basis of these new aids". There cannot be one single road to success, and it would be folly for me to be categorical on procedure, keeping in mind Goethe's dictum: "Durch Heftigkeit ersetzt der Irrende, was ihm an Wahrheit und an Kräften fehlt".

One can, however, be categorical with regard to one important aspect of the construction of these cartoon films. Under no circumstances should a teaching film be such as to pull the learning processes of the pupils, and thus cause dismay and frustration. Time must be allowed for each statement tied to a pictorial situation to be made

two or even three times. Furthermore, within the stimulus-and-response situation in class, it may be said that, whereas the written text forces the reader to withdraw into himself, to transform the words into thought, the visual sensations take him out of himself. They demand compliance and a neutral mind. One cannot oppose visual impressions; they are not subject to our will. We cannot accept or reject them as we please. Let us realise, therefore, the "near-hypnotic" effect of the right kind of teaching film, and our ability to use these sensory stimuli as a means towards more efficient language learning, by tying the right kind of picture to the right kind of text.

The German moralist and cartoonist, Wilhelm Busch, was aware of these facts as far as children are concerned. He increased the popularity of narrative pictorial sequences to such an extent that one may say he brought the cartoon-caricature to the point where the film cartoon could adopt a technique of its own. In spite of the undoubted cruelty in Busch's work, we owe him a great debt.

Insofar as humour often acts as an incentive in the stimulus-and-response relationship, the good language teaching film, particularly of the animated cartoon type, should contain an element of good humour in the development of incident. The acquisition of a foreign language — even under optimum conditions — is an arduous process. It may be agreed, I hope, that pupils may as well learn with a smile. It has been said that the humorist identifies himself with his audience, whereas "the teacher must operate on a higher level". If identification with an audience — within the classroom — means working *with* the children, and not talking *at* them, then humour is all to the good. The occasional chuckle and smile are vitally necessary if the teacher's endeavour is to be humane and enlightened. There can be no doubt whatever that these new teaching tools will help to humanise the image of the pedagogue. They will contribute materially towards purposeful and efficient language teaching and learning as long as the principle is accepted that one must never become a slave to any teaching aid, however valuable it may be.

The language teacher, perhaps more than any other, must be both craftsman and artist. The judicious use of the best instructional media should aid him, both in his methodical approach to his work and in the relentless demands made upon him, to use his imagination and resourcefulness in creating the "linguistic springboards" for his day-to-day work.

No researcher likes to be engaged on a wild goose chase or pursue a line of narrow insignificance. The significance of this practical endeavour lies in the author's belief that he has attempted to arrive at a testimony, established after a long drawn-out fight with the preliminary, the fragmentary and the confused elements befogging this issue ... a testimony which may have greater validity than it has hitherto been possible to submit in the name of furtherance of education.

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